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SUBJECT: CODEL ORTIZ DISCUSSES GROWING U.S.-VIETNAM TIES, EMR  
INCIDENT, WITH SENIOR MFA AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OFFICIALS

Ref: Hanoi 636

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#### Summary

1. (SBU) On April 6, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem and National Assembly Vice Chairman Nguyen Van Yeu separately told Codel Ortiz that U.S.-Vietnam relations are growing across the board and are bound to expand more in the coming years. Both leaders cited recent landmarks in the evolving relationship, such as Vietnam's accession to the WTO and the exchange of high-level visits, and appealed for "more discussion" to narrow differences on contentious issues such as trade and human rights. DPM/FM Khiem noted that defense cooperation is developing well in the areas of counterterrorism, the search for MIAs and military equipment sales. The Codel said the USG is committed to stronger relations with Vietnam.

2. (SBU) The previous day's incident at the Ambassador's residence, in which security officers physically prevented the family members of political activists to enter (reftel), was raised in both meetings, with Codel member Loretta Sanchez telling her hosts that she will inform her constituents that Vietnam is "going backwards" in the area of human rights. The Ambassador informed DPM/FM Khiem that the incident "did not reflect well on our relationship." He added that much work needs to be done, through such venues as the Human Rights Dialogue, to improve understanding. End Summary.

DM/FM Pham Gia Khiem

3. (SBU) During his meeting with the Codel (full delegation list in paragraph 16), DPM/FM Khiem focused his remarks on his March visit to the United States and the "expansion and increasing effectiveness" of our bilateral relations. Highlights of his trip were the signing of key agreements on nonproliferation and maritime trade, discussions in preparation for President Nguyen Minh Triet's own visit to the United States later this year and the DPM/M's delivery of a letter from Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung to the President requesting expanded bilateral education assistance. High-level visits between the United States and Vietnam are on the rise, and the DPM/FM discussed his desire for even more delegations to visit the United States in Vietnam. Furthermore, security and other cooperation is developing well in the areas of counterterrorism, the search for MIAs and military equipment sales, said DPM Khiem.

4. (SBU) Chairman Ortiz said he will work to strengthen the bond between the United States and Vietnam. "While we learn as we move along, more things unite our governments than divide us." There

have been advances in civil rights and religious activities in Vietnam, and there have been many positive changes since his first visit in 1983. Rep. Wilson praised Vietnam's dynamic economy and, citing DPM/FM Khiem's comments about military relations, recalled that two Vietnamese officers will soon graduate from their DOD-funded English-language program in the United States, providing the groundwork for further cooperation in the future. While acknowledging that we have concerns, Rep. Bodallo also commented on the many changes she has seen in Vietnam over the past 25 years. Overall, relations between the countries are improving, she said, and the more we "sit together and discuss concerns, the better friends we will become."

5 (SBU) Rep. Sanchez thanked the DPM for being allowed to visit after not having been able to receive a visa for almost five years. She observed that when she came in 2000, she was allowed to move around the country, meeting with political dissidents and human rights advocates. Since that time, most of these people have been jailed, and her request to visit some of them in prison (Note: NED Fellow Le Quoc Quan) was denied. Furthermore, the incident the day before was "disheartening," the Congresswoman said. When she returns to Washington, she will report what she saw -- that Vietnam is going backwards in the area of human rights. Congresswoman Sanchez expressed hope that the GVN will begin to understand the importance of basic human rights for the Vietnamese people.

16. (SBU) DPM Khiem responded that he "shares Sanchez's view about human rights," but further stated that each country has different conditions and laws adopted based on the consensus of the majority. Only those who break the law are tried. He agreed with the need for more discussion, mentioning his meetings on the Hill during his trip and the upcoming bilateral Human Rights Dialogue.

17. (SBU) The Ambassador agreed with Rep. Sanchez regarding the growing concern about human rights in Vietnam. Referring to the incident at his residence, he said it was an "ugly scene" such as he had never witnessed in Vietnam. "It did not reflect well on our

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relationship," he emphasized.

NA Vice Chairman Yeu  
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18. (SBU) At a separate meeting at the National Assembly (NA), Vice Chairman Nguyen Van Yeu concentrated his remarks on the positive trends in U.S.-Vietnam relations. He cited the Codel's visit to the National Assembly as "one more landmark" in the evolving relationship, and relayed that he hopes more exchanges between legislators from the two countries take place.

19. (SBU) In continuing down the renewal ("doi moi") path, the GVN is always looking to expand relations with other countries, Yeu continued. Vietnam's accession to the WTO, growing U.S.-Vietnam trade and the exchange of high-level visits are proof that U.S.-Vietnam ties are strong and destined to get stronger. Yeu thanked Codel members for U.S. assistance to fight avian influenza and HIV/AIDS and said "it is good to see" cooperation between our two countries in defense and security. It is now "normal" to see U.S. naval ships calling on Vietnam's ports, he remarked.

110. (SBU) In the context of sound relations, certain issues remain, meaning that more dialogue is needed, the Vice Chairman continued. He cited "basa" fish and human rights issues as areas in which more discussion should take place. The NA pays a lot of attention to the issue of Intellectual Property Rights because Vietnam understands it is in its benefit to do so. "We strive for cooperation on this issue with other countries, including the United States," Yeu asserted.

111. (SBU) Rep. Wilson told Yeu and the other NA officials that the Vietnamese Embassy and NA staff in Washington have impressed him with their professionalism and dedication to the U.S.-Vietnam relationship. He thanked meeting participants for their efforts to expand trade and push finding those unaccounted for from the Vietnam War. Vietnam has achieved a great deal economically in such a short

time, and Rep. Wilson urged the NA to send more delegations to Washington to further improve relations. Rep. Bordallo added applauded the GVN leadership for its accomplishments in bettering the lives of Vietnam's citizens.

¶12. (SBU) Rep. Sanchez thanked the GVN for granting her a visa and expressed gratitude that the GVN kept its promise to let her in the country. However, the incident at the Ambassador's residence was saddening and does not conform to a government that says it respects its citizens, she said. The Congresswoman requested that she be allowed to visit Le Quoc Quan in prison, noting that she has a special bond with him because she nominated him for a Reagan/Fascell fellowship at the National Endowment for Democracy.

¶13. (SBU) Vice Chairman Yeu responded that the schedule of the visit had been set by both sides and, because it was "tight" already, her visit to the detention center could not occur. He hoped that her time in Hanoi had helped her to "better understand" Vietnam's situation.

¶14. (SBU) The Ambassador cited the Codel's visit as an important step in the evolving U.S.-Vietnam relationship. The future is bright, "but we need to work to improve understanding." The Ambassador said that he shared Rep. Sanchez's disappointment about the incident and in the GVN explanation that its actions were motivated by security concerns. The female guests "in no way were threatening to anyone."

¶15. (SBU) Chairman Ortiz pointed out that, after 200 years, the United States is still striving to perfect its own democracy. He said he understood Rep. Sanchez's concerns because she has many Vietnamese-Americans in her district. In the words of former President Johnson, it is time for the two sides to "sit down and reason together," he said, and assured Vietnamese participants in the meeting that the USG wants to "work with the GVN." Even marriages require a lot of hard work to overcome difficulties, the Chairman stated.

¶16. (U) The Codel had four members: Chairman Solomon Ortiz (D-TX), Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-CA), Rep. Madeleine Bordallo (D-GU) and Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC).

¶17. (U) Codel Ortiz cleared this message.

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